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Commission Special Rapporteur Grossman Investigates Women's Rights

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element which distinguishes the Cairo Conference from prior world population conferences. The Cairo Conference ended with a record level of consensus; the Vatican approved six of the final document's sixteen chapters. In both earlier conferences, the Holy See had refused to join the consensus in any way.

As noted in the Programme of Action, population management policies remain the sovereign right of each nation, consistent with its values, though all policies ideally should conform to international human rights standards. Although the Programme only has the power of recommendation, its effectiveness will depend on the implementation of its suggestions at the national level where it will likely face religious and cultural opposition. Hence, the participation of women in domestic population issues will likely be tempered by national and local realities.

Nonetheless, the participation of women and women's rights organizations at the Cairo Conference is a growing trend on the international scene. Past occasions include the 1990 World Summit for Children, the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights. Upcoming opportunities for such participation include the Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing, China and the Social Summit in Copenhagen, Denmark, both to be held in 1995. ☉

concern for the treatment of women. She explains that "the project is an expression of the Commission's historic and renewed commitment to ensuring that women fully and equally enjoy their human rights."

In addition to her duties with the women's project, Abi-Mershed is the Commission's monitor for several states in the Americas. As monitor, she is charged with conducting on-site visits and preparing draft reports for the Commission's consideration. These reports, triggered by petitions from states or individuals, determine whether there have been violations of the Convention or the Declaration. Abi-Mershed is currently pursuing her LL.M. degree at Georgetown University. ☉

Commission Special Rapporteur Grossman Investigates Women's Rights

by Gabriel Eckstein

During the 85th session of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Commission Member and Washington College of Law Professor Claudio Grossman was appointed Special Rapporteur to study whether member states' legislation conforms with the rights of women under the Inter-American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man and the American Convention on Human Rights. "It is a dramatic problem," says Grossman, who proposed that the Commission devote more time to women's issues. "Women's rights, in spite of statements of equality in the American Convention and Declaration, have not been fully realized."

In recent years, gender issues have come to the fore in debates in many

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countries and international organizations. The recent UN Cairo Population Conference and the Reproductive Rights Conference held at The American University are but two examples of a growing awareness among governmental and institutional actors of the important concerns which women currently face. Nonetheless, Grossman reports that violations of women's human rights are still ignored or seriously marginalized in the Americas. "In almost every reality," he states, "women are still under-represented although they make up half of the population." Much of this condition, Grossman believes, is due to "male dominated agendas" which pervade much of this hemisphere. Grossman also pointed to the more brutal forms of violations inflicted against women, including domestic violence and rape, as examples of the lack of awareness of the plight of women.

In his role as Special Rapporteur Grossman plans to organize fact-finding projects to survey the degree to which state practices comply with regional human rights instruments. Grossman hopes that his efforts will result in constructive recommendations for improving the status of women as well as for increasing awareness of women's positive role in society. "First we have to correct the abuses that are present," states Grossman. "Then we have to go towards the realization of formal equality. And third, we need to create a reality where women's concerns are reflected in our discourse."

Towards that end, the Washington College of Law has proposed a joint effort whereby the law school will provide facilities, research assistants, and other needs. Established by two women, the school has a noteworthy history of promoting gender equality. Grossman also added that in the past, WCL has been a very important contributor to the activities of the Commission. "I don't say this in a boastful way, but in terms of the Inter-American system of the protection of human rights, there is no school which has done more." ☉



Dean Claudio Grossman

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